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Nightmask

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5
MAR



DREAM KILL

SEVEN SECONDS...

DEAR GOD!

NO!

NOT JANET...
NOT JULIE...

SEVEN SECONDS...
SOMETIMES THAT'S ALL
THE TIME REQUIRED.

TO MAKE THAT ONE
MISTAKE... TAKE THAT
ONE MISTEP...

THAT ONE SPUR-OF-THE-
MOMENT CHOICE WHICH
WILL FOREVER COLOR THE
REMAINDER OF A PERSON'S
LIFE.

DETER BARRON JUST
LOST THE BEST PART
OF HIS LIFE.

COLOR THE
REMAINDER
BLACK.

BOOM!

CARY
BATES
WRITER

ARVELL
JONES
PENCILER

TONY
DEZUNIGA
INKER

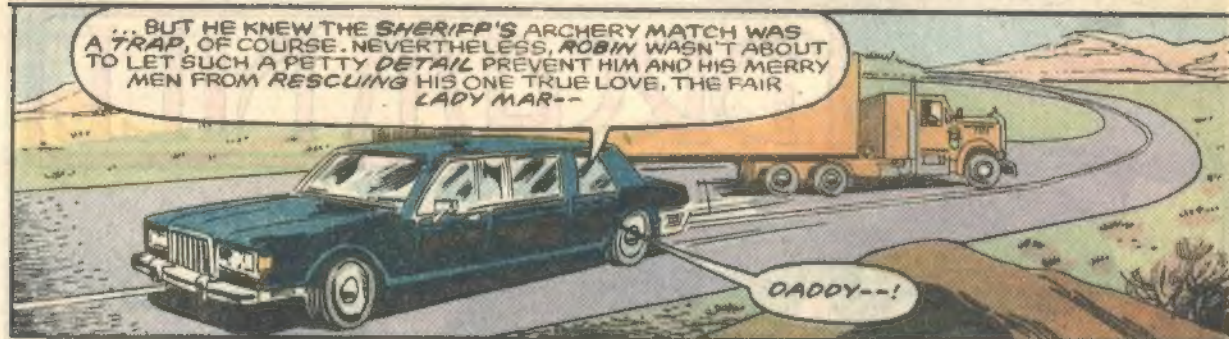
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... MOM... DAD...
TEDDY...

I'M SORRY
I DIDN'T GET
THERE--

NOT IN
TIME...

NOT IN
TIME...

NOT IN
TIM--



EYAAAAHHHH!



KEITH...
KEITH!

IT'S ALL RIGHT
NOW. IT'S ME--
TEDDY!

WHAT
IS IT--?

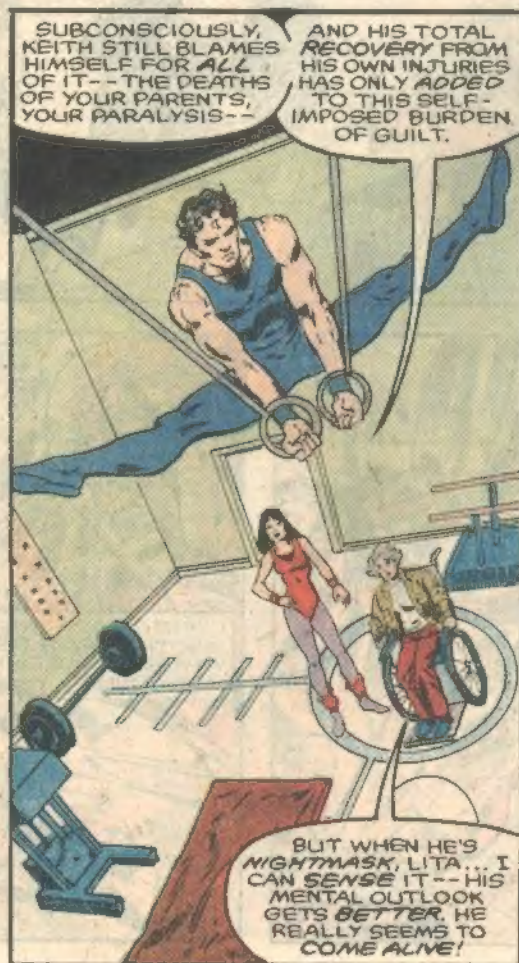
NOT THE
DREAM
AGAIN--



... IN A WAY, THEODORA,
IT WAS YOU WHO MAY
HAVE BEEN THE
MORE FORTUNATE
SURVIVOR.

TRUE, THE
BOMB COST
YOU THE USE
OF YOUR
LEGS...

... BUT EVER
SINCE THAT
DAY AT THE
AIRPORT, I
FEAR YOUR
BROTHER
HAS BEEN
PAYING A FAR
HIGHER
PENALTY.



SUBCONSCIOUSLY,
KEITH STILL BLAMES
HIMSELF FOR ALL
OF IT-- THE DEATHS
OF YOUR PARENTS,
YOUR PARALYSIS--

AND HIS TOTAL
RECOVERY FROM
HIS OWN INJURIES
HAS ONLY ADDED
TO THIS SELF-
IMPOSED BURDEN
OF GUILT.

BUT WHEN HE'S
NIGHTMASK, LITA... I
CAN SENSE IT-- HIS
MENTAL OUTLOOK
GETS BETTER. HE
REALLY SEEMS TO
COME ALIVE!



BECAUSE NIGHTMASK
ALLOWS KEITH TO
IMMERSE HIMSELF IN
OTHER PEOPLE'S
DREAMS, CHILD...

WRESTLING
WITH THEIR
PROBLEMS...
CONFRONTING
THEIR
DEMONS.

ANYTHING
TO TAKE
HIS MIND
OFF THE
DEMONS
THAT STILL
HAUNT
KEITH
REMSEN.



WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME, LUCIAN. YOU WANT TO RETIRE NIGHTMASK?

I'M A LITTLE YOUNG TO BE PULLING DOWN A PENSION.

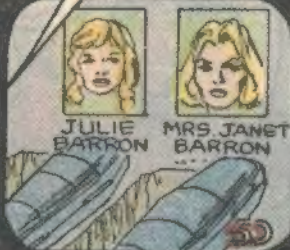
NOBODY SAID ANYTHING ABOUT RETIREMENT, KEITH. I'M ONLY SUGGESTING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

IT WOULD ALLOW YOU SOME TIME TO YOURSELF... TIME AWAY FROM DREAM RESEARCH AND THIS INSTITUTE.



THE AIRPORT EXPLOSION LEFT YOU WITH THE FREAK HEAD-INJURY WHICH HAS ENABLED YOU TO ENTER THE DREAMS OF OTHERS.

BUT I WAS SO FASCINATED AND PREOCCUPIED WITH YOUR UNIQUE POWER AND ALL ITS POSSIBILITIES...



CHUCK CHUCK



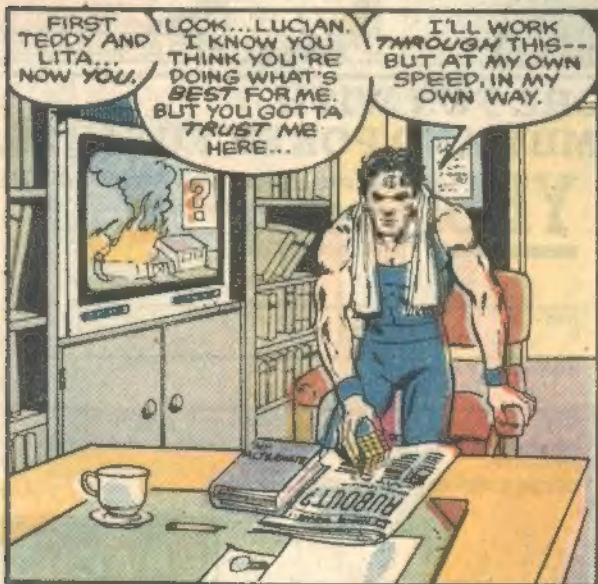
... I LOST SIGHT OF THE FACT IT WAS THE SAME EXPLOSION WHICH ALSO ROBBED MY 18 YEAR OLD SUBJECT OF HIS PARENTS.

YOUR NIGHTMASK MISSIONS COMMENCED SO QUICKLY YOU NEVER HAD THE PROPER AMOUNT OF TIME TO YOURSELF TO MOURN THEIR--



CHUCK CHUCK

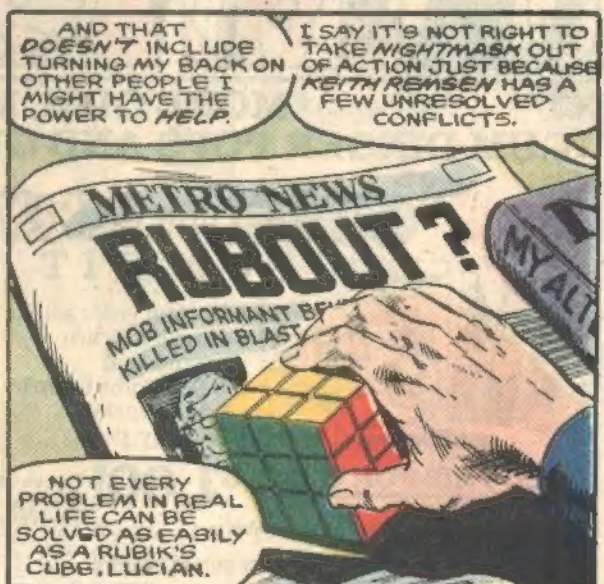
I GET THE PICTURE...



FIRST TEDDY AND LITA... NOW YOU.

LOOK... LUCIAN. I KNOW YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING WHAT'S BEST FOR ME. BUT YOU GOTTA TRUST ME HERE...

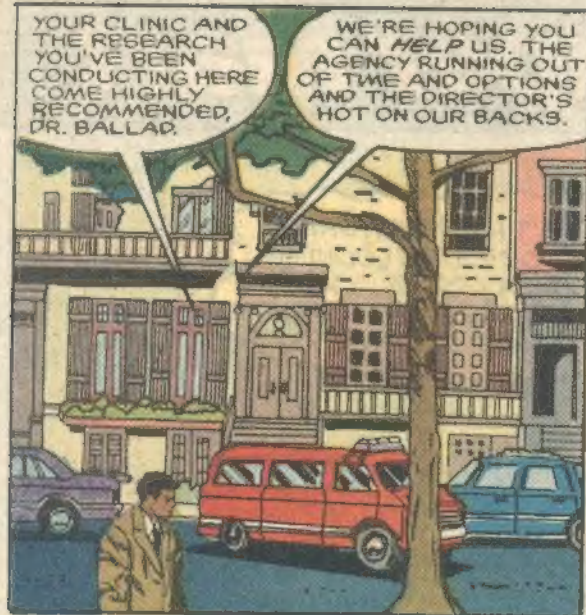
I'LL WORK THROUGH THIS-- BUT AT MY OWN SPEED, IN MY OWN WAY.



AND THAT DOESN'T INCLUDE TURNING MY BACK ON OTHER PEOPLE I MIGHT HAVE THE POWER TO HELP.

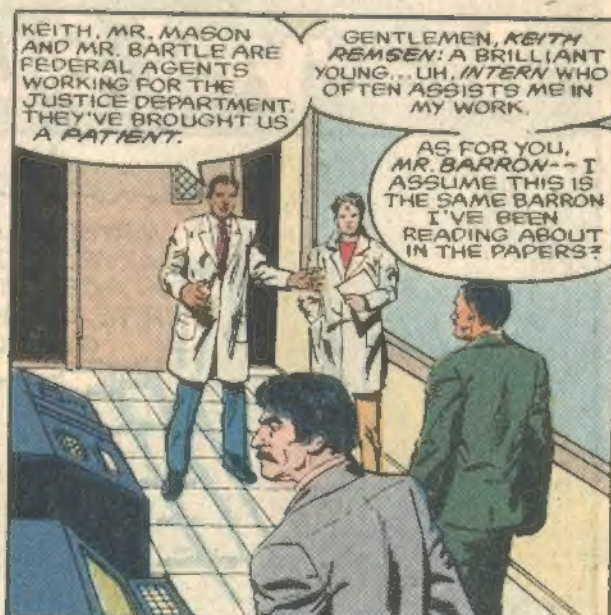
I SAY IT'S NOT RIGHT TO TAKE NIGHTMASK OUT OF ACTION JUST BECAUSE KEITH RENSEN HAS A FEW UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS.

NOT EVERY PROBLEM IN REAL LIFE CAN BE SOLVED AS EASILY AS A RUBIK'S CUBE, LUCIAN.



YOUR CLINIC AND THE RESEARCH YOU'VE BEEN CONDUCTING HERE COME HIGHLY RECOMMENDED, DR. BALLAD.

WE'RE HOPEING YOU CAN *HELP* US. THE AGENCY RUNNING OUT OF TIME AND OPTIONS AND THE DIRECTOR'S HOT ON OUR BACKS.



KEITH, MR. MASON AND MR. BARTLE ARE FEDERAL AGENTS WORKING FOR THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT. THEY'VE BROUGHT US A PATIENT.

GENTLEMEN, *KEITH REMSEN*: A BRILLIANT YOUNG... UH, *INTERV* WHO OFTEN ASSISTS ME IN MY WORK.

AS FOR YOU, MR. *BARRON*-- I ASSUME THIS IS THE SAME *BARRON* I'VE BEEN READING ABOUT IN THE PAPERS?



THAT'S WHY WE REGISTERED HIM HERE UNDER AN ALIAS, DOC.

WHEN A MAN WHO SERVED AS HEAD ACCOUNTANT FOR THE MOB WALKS AWAY AND DECIDES TO TURN STATE'S EVIDENCE--

THAT MAN ENDS UP WITH THE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF A HOUSEFLY.



THE CAR-BOMB INCIDENT IN THE PAPERS-- THAT WAS AN ATROCITY. HIS WIFE, HIS CHILD...

AND ONE OF OUR BEST AGENTS.

THESE CRIMINALS WILL STOP AT *NOTHING*... AND THEY *DIDN'T* STOP THERE.

THERE WAS A SECOND ATTEMPT, THIS ONE WE KEPT OUT OF THE PAPERS.



"IT WAS JUST AFTER WE SET UP *BARRON* IN A 'SAFE HOUSE' THREE STATES AWAY..."

LOOK AT HIM. BARELY EATS. HASN'T SAID A WORD SINCE THE FUNERAL.

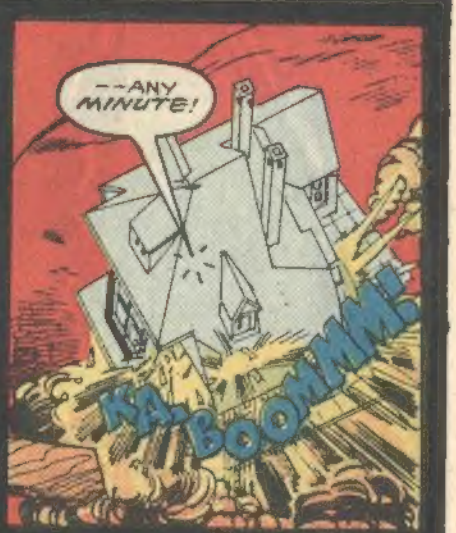
HATE TO SEE WHAT I'D BE LIKE IF IT WAS MY WIFE AND KID.



"A CALL CAME IN FROM ONE OF OUR LOOKOUTS--AN INFORMANT HAD TIPPED THE MOB ABOUT THE HOUSE IN ADVANCE--"

MOVE, *BARRON*.

OUR LEASE HERE COULD RUN OUT--



--ANY MINUTE!

KA-BOOMMM!

"WE MANAGED TO REACH OUR ESCAPE HATCH JUST IN TIME--BUT THE EXPLOSION CAUSED A CAVE-IN."

"BUT BARRON-- HE STOPPED A BRICK WITH HIS SKULL!"

"MY PARTNER AND I GOT OUT WITH JUST A FEW SCRAPES."

"WE GOT HIM TO AN EMERGENCY WARD INSIDE 12 MINUTES. A MILD CONCUSSION. THAT'S WHAT THEY SAID. 'HE'LL WAKE UP IN A FEW HOURS WITH A HEADACHE AND STITCHES. THAT'S ABOUT IT.'"

"THAT WAS FIVE DAYS AGO."

THEY BROUGHT IN HALF A DOZEN SPECIALISTS. ALL OF 'EM PRETTY MUCH AGREED-- THERE WAS NO MEDICAL REASON THEY COULD FIND FOR BARRON TO REMAIN OUT OF IT FOR FIVE DAYS STRAIGHT.

THEY TRIED SHOCK TREATMENTS, STIMULANTS, YOU NAME IT-- UNTIL BARRON'S HEARTBEAT WENT IRREGULAR ON THEM.

THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE UP AGAINST, DR. BALLAD. AND JUST SO YOU KNOW--

THERE'S A TIME-FACTOR HERE. BARRON WAS SCHEDULED TO TESTIFY BEFORE A GRAND JURY DAY AFTER TOMORROW.

IF HE'S STILL VEGGED OUT-- IF HE'S NOT ON THAT WITNESS STAND GIVING NAMES, DATES AND NUMBERS--

--THREE TOP MOBSTERS WHO RUN MOST OF THE ORGANIZATION ARE SURE TO WALK.

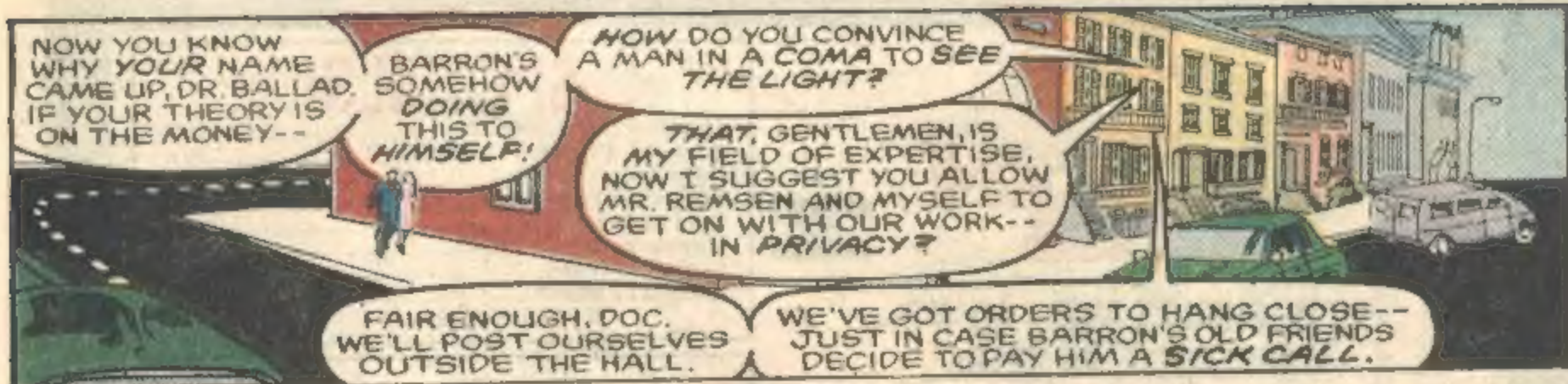
WE WON'T HAVE THE CRUCIAL EVIDENCE WE NEED TO MAKE THE INDICTMENTS STICK.

IF THERE'S ONE THING I'VE LEARNED OVER THE COURSE OF MY YEARS IN THIS FIELD, GENTLEMEN--

IT IS THAT ONE CAN NEVER UNDER ESTIMATE THE AWESOME INFLUENCE OF THE BRAIN OVER THE BODY.

MY GUESS IS MR. BARRON'S MIND HAS CHOSEN TO INHIBIT HIS RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.

YOU GOTTA WAKE HIM UP WITHOUT KILLING HIM, DOC.



NOW YOU KNOW WHY YOUR NAME CAME UP, DR. BALLAD. IF YOUR THEORY IS ON THE MONEY--

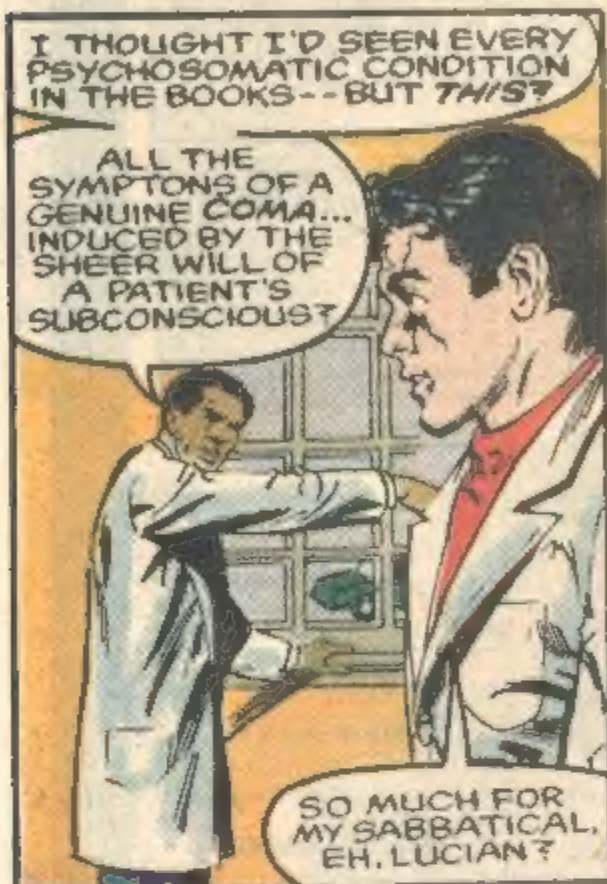
BARRON'S SOMEHOW DOING THIS TO HIMSELF!

HOW DO YOU CONVINCE A MAN IN A COMA TO SEE THE LIGHT?

THAT, GENTLEMEN, IS MY FIELD OF EXPERTISE. NOW I SUGGEST YOU ALLOW MR. REMSEN AND MYSELF TO GET ON WITH OUR WORK-- IN PRIVACY?

FAIR ENOUGH, DOC. WE'LL POST OURSELVES OUTSIDE THE HALL.

WE'VE GOT ORDERS TO HANG CLOSE-- JUST IN CASE BARRON'S OLD FRIENDS DECIDE TO PAY HIM A SICK CALL.



I THOUGHT I'D SEEN EVERY PSYCHOSOMATIC CONDITION IN THE BOOKS-- BUT THIS?

ALL THE SYMPTOMS OF A GENUINE COMA... INDUCED BY THE SHEER WILL OF A PATIENT'S SUBCONSCIOUS?

SO MUCH FOR MY SABBATICAL, EH, LUCIAN?



CARE TO JOIN ME FOR SUPPER WITH TEDDY AND LITA?

YOU KNOW HOW I HATE NIGHT-MASKING ON AN EMPTY STOMACH.

ONE FAVOR-- LET'S KEEP YOU-KNOW-WHO IN THE DARK ON THIS ONE OR I'LL NEVER HEAR THE END OF IT.



LATER THAT NIGHT...

KEITH!



I TOLD YOU SO, KEITH!

I TOLD YOU YOU NEEDED A REST!

WHOA!

HIT THE BRAKES, LITTLE GIRL!



I'M NOT A "LITTLE GIRL"!

I GOT BUSINESS IN THERE. I'M ONE OF DR. BALLAD'S CONSULTANTS.

IT'S LATE, KID. GO BACK TO YOUR ROOM.



AH, THERE YOU ARE, THEODORA. DO COME IN.

MR. REMSEN AND I WILL BE NEEDING YOUR EXPERTISE TO FULLY EVALUATE OUR LATEST FINDINGS.

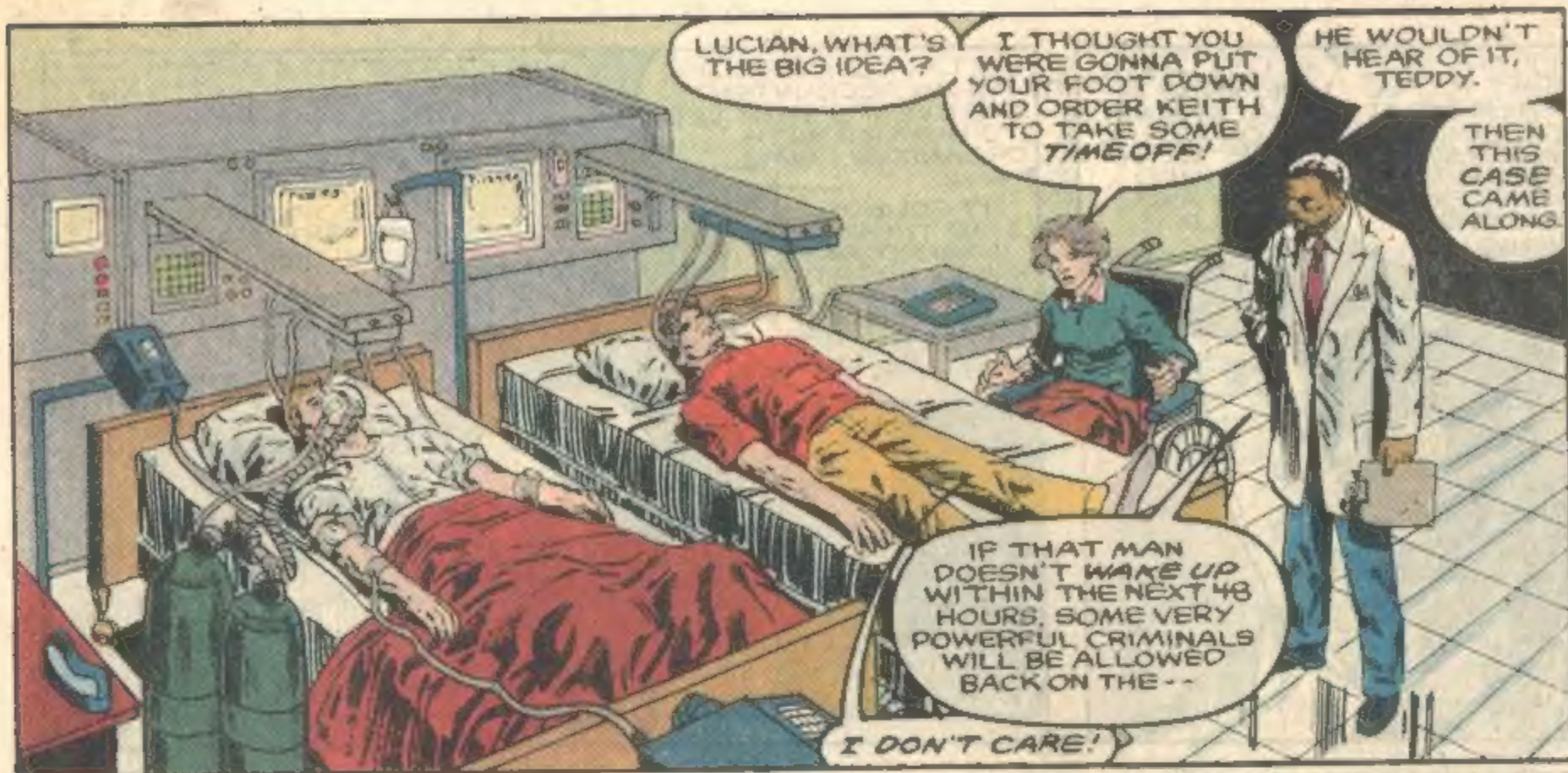
LEAD THE WAY, DOCTOR. AND DO ASK THESE NIGHT WATCHMEN TO SEE WE'RE NOT DISTURBED?



FIRST AN *INTERN* BARELY OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL... THEN A CONSULTANT TOO YOUNG TO HAVE HER FIRST PIMPLE?

WHAT KIND OF PLACE IS BALLAD RUNNING HERE?

DON'T ASK ME. I'M JAMES BOND.



IN LIGHT OF WHAT YOU'VE DESCRIBED, IT'S NOT HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY BARRON MIGHT PREFER TO NEVER WAKE UP

AS LONG AS HE REMAINS IN THAT DREAM HE CAN STILL "BE" WITH HIS DEAD WIFE AND CHILD



HIS LACKLUSTER LIFE AS AN ACCOUNTANT... THE EVENTS THAT LED TO HIS TIES WITH ORGANIZED CRIME...

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE DREAM WASHED AWAY EVERY NEGATIVE ASPECT OF THE BLEAK REALITY PETER BARRON LEFT BEHIND



ME, I MORE THAN EMPATHIZE WITH IT, LUCIAN. MORE THAN YOU COULD KNOW.

I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE TWO PEOPLE YOU LOVE VERY MUCH TO A KILLER'S BOMB...



I REALIZE THAT, KEITH, AND TEDDY SHE SENSED IT, WHILE YOU WERE STILL UNDER



BUT YOU ALSO HAVE TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF PETER BARRON'S CONDITION DOESN'T IMPROVE!

THERE'S SO MUCH ELSE AT STAKE HERE.



IT'S LIKE I SAID, DOC.

OFF THE CASE!



KNOCK KNOCK

GO AWAY, TEDDY.

FINE WAY TO SAY HELLO.

SO HOW'S TRICKS?



YOU WERE RIGHT, YOU KNOW. ME AND MY BIG MOUTH, I SHOULD'VE TAKEN BALLAD UP ON HIS OFFER

I COULD'VE BEEN OFF SOMEWHERE FISHING NOW.

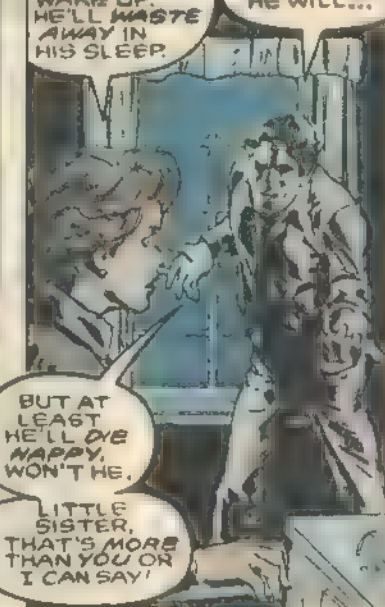
YOU HATE FISHING

AND YOU'RE GONNA HATE HEARING THIS DR BALLAD'S READINGS ARE ALL TELLING HIM THE SAME THING--

-- IF BARRON ISN'T BROUGHT OUT OF HIS COMA SOON, THE DAMAGE TO HIS AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM WILL BE PERMANENT.

HE'LL NEVER WAKE UP. HE'LL WASTE AWAY IN HIS SLEEP

SO MAYBE HE WILL...



BUT AT LEAST HE'LL DIE HAPPY, WON'T HE.

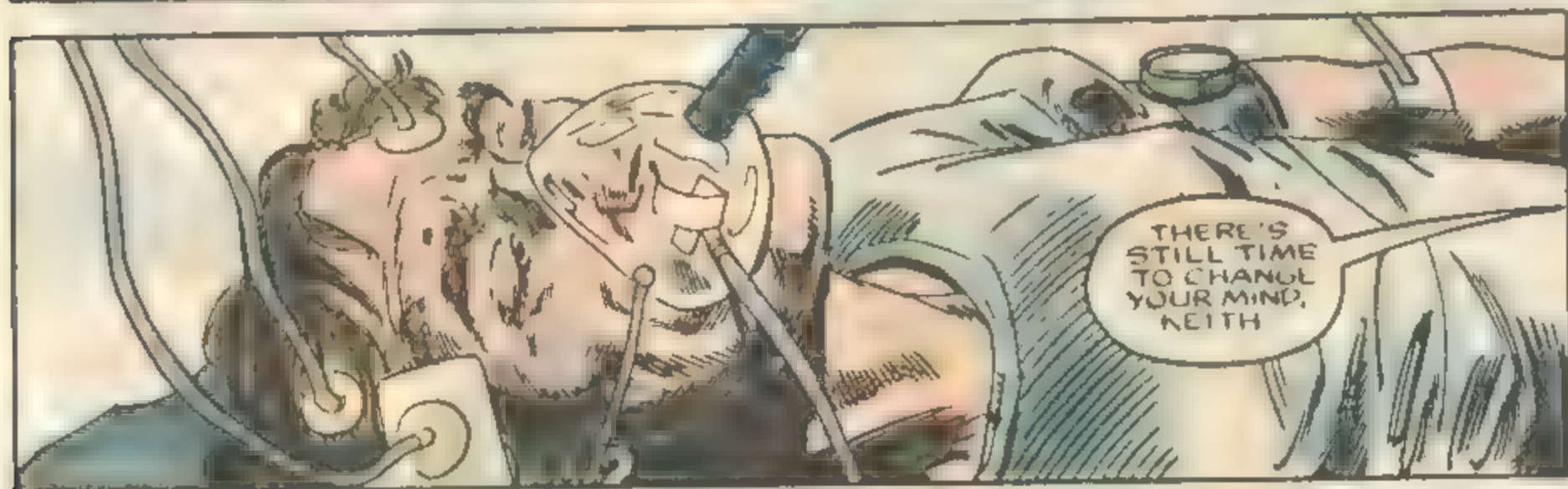
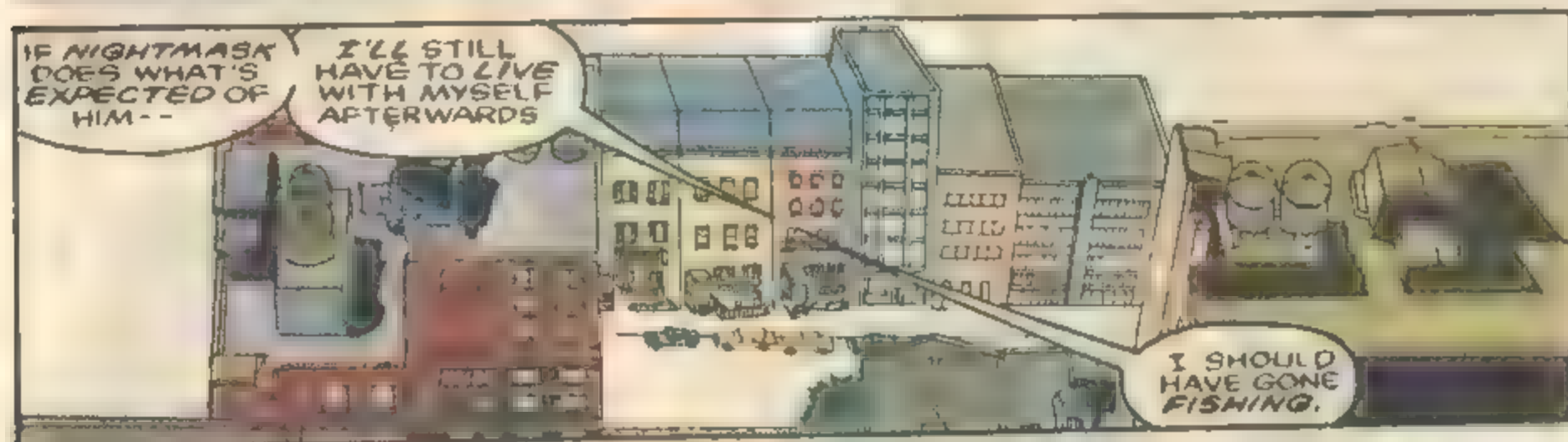
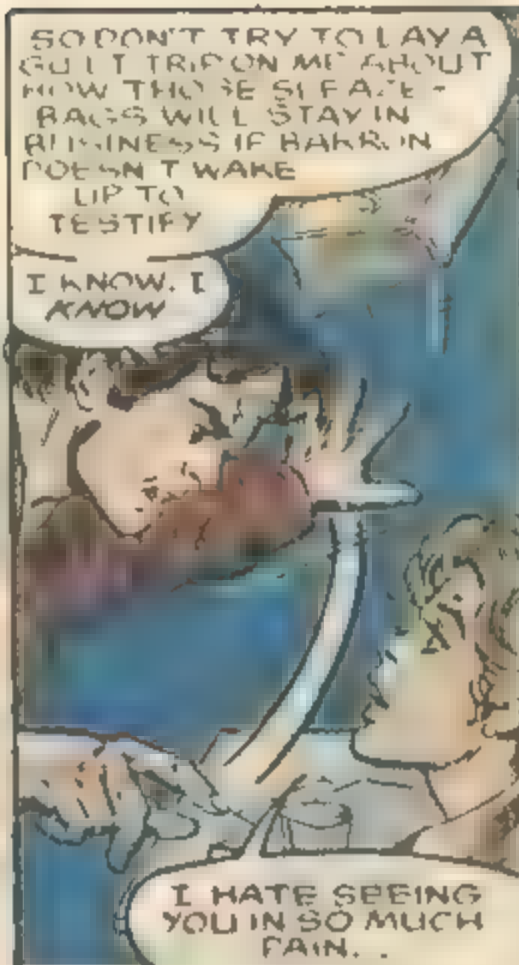
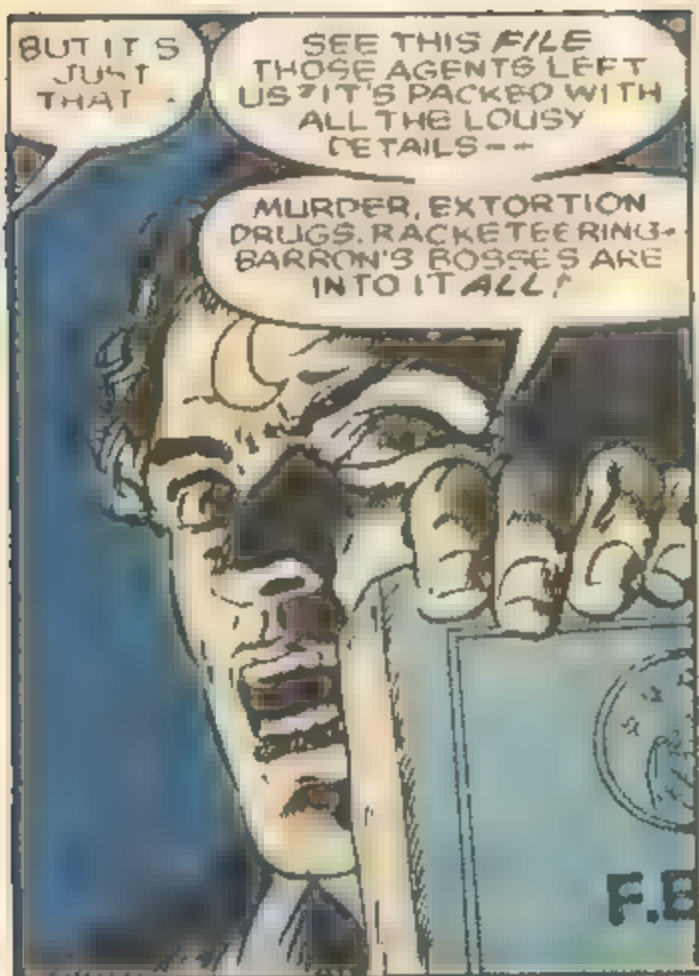
LITTLE SISTER, THAT'S MORE THAN YOU OR I CAN SAY!

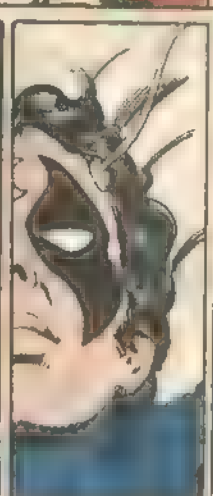
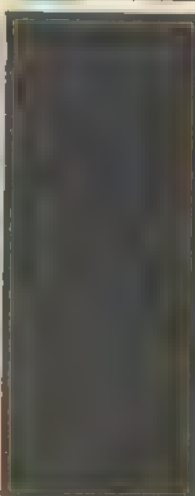
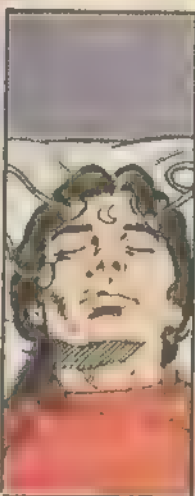
K-KEITH, I'VE NEVER HEARD YOU TALK THIS WAY BEFORE. WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?

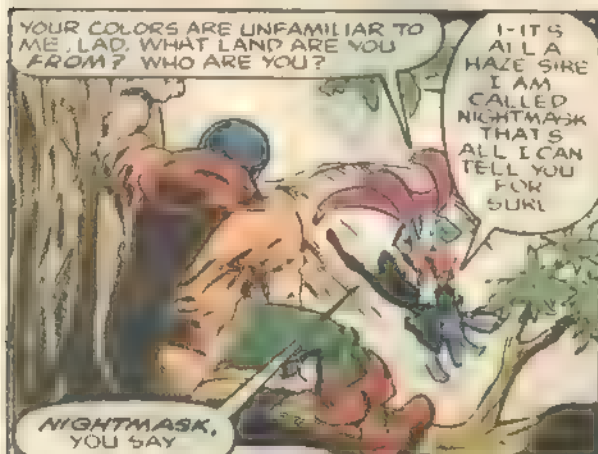
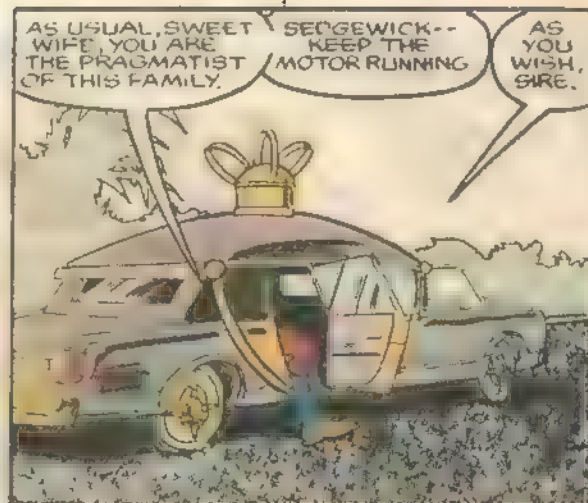
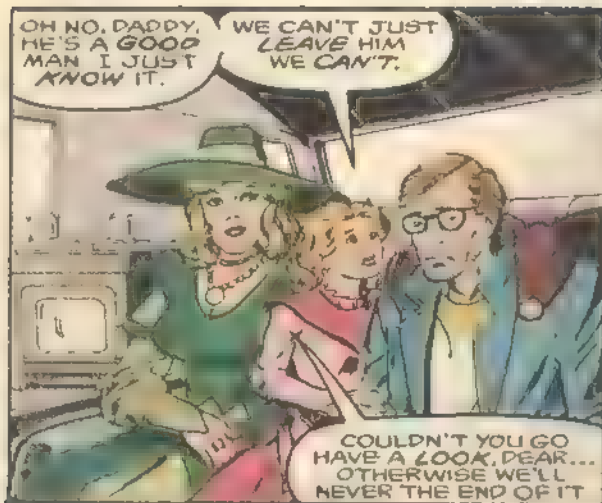


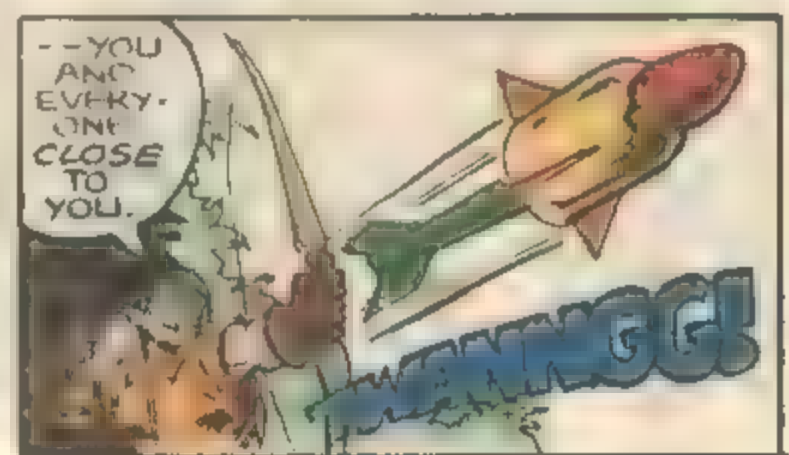
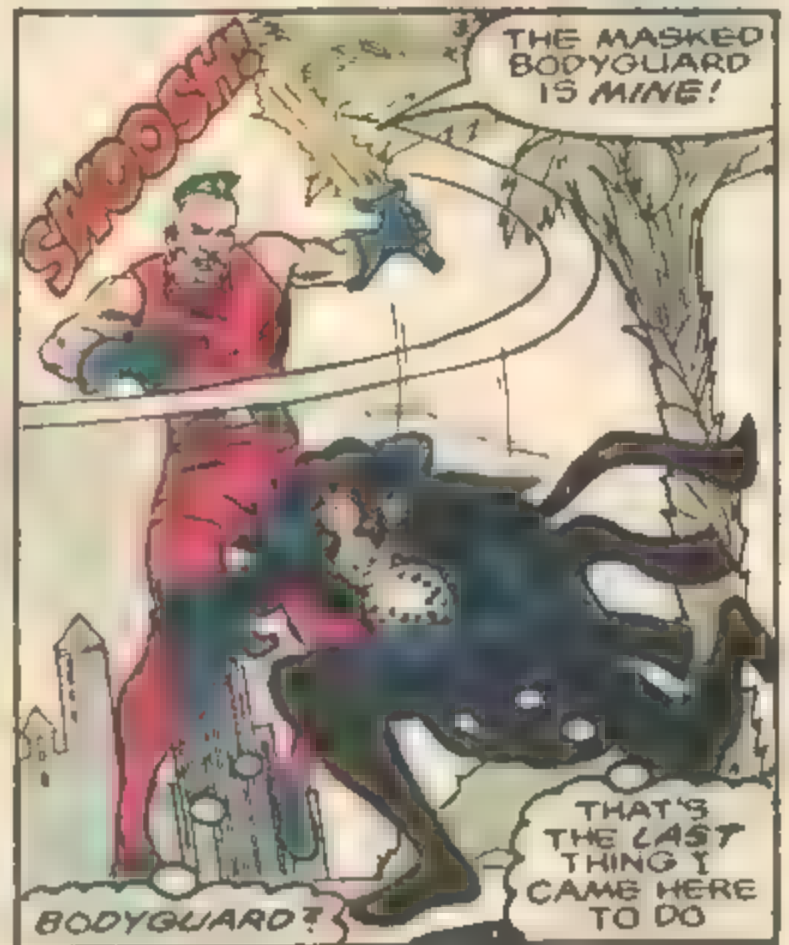
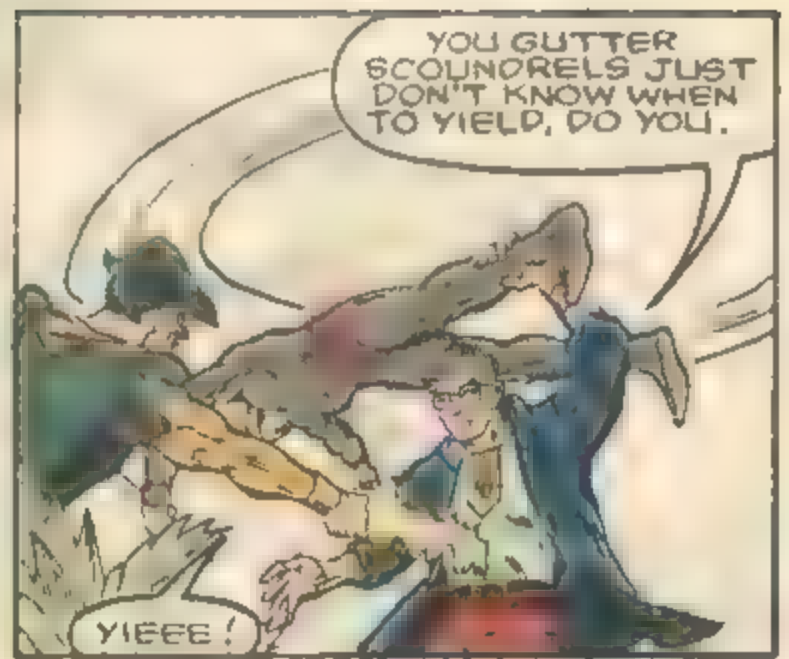
INTO ME? WHAT'S WITH YOU?

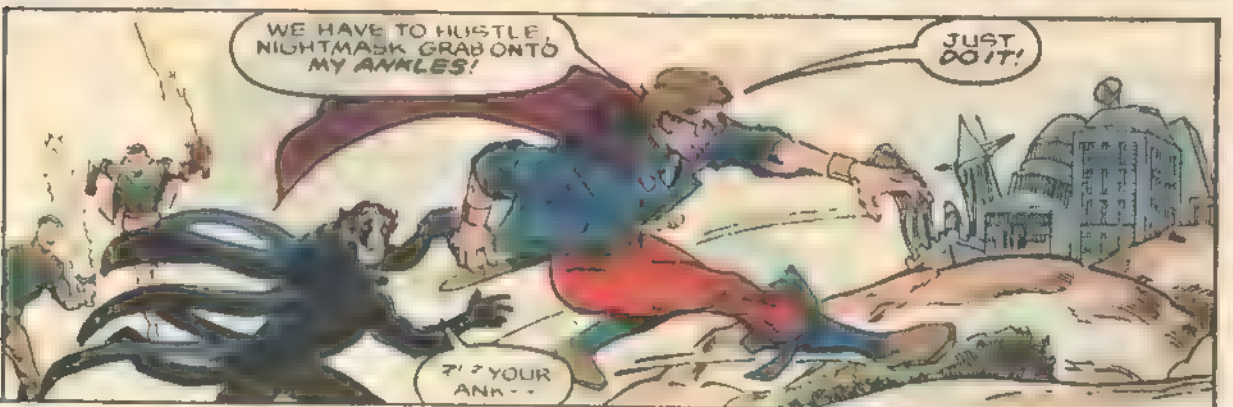
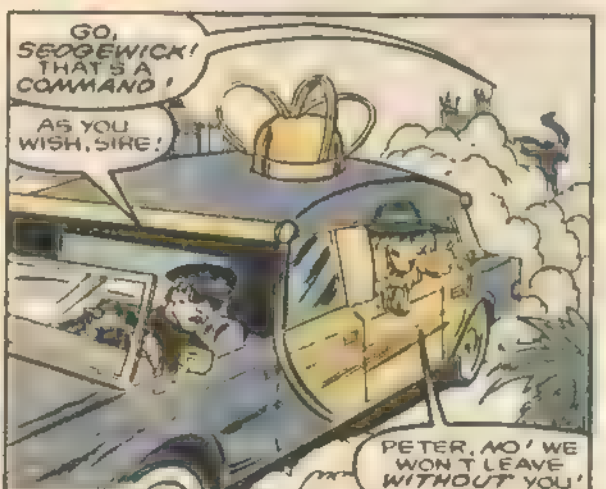
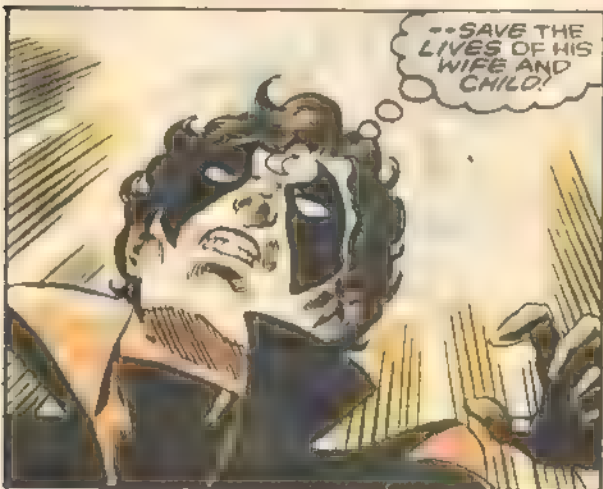
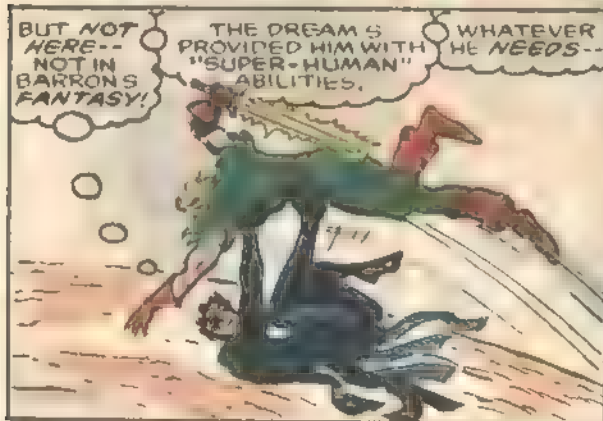
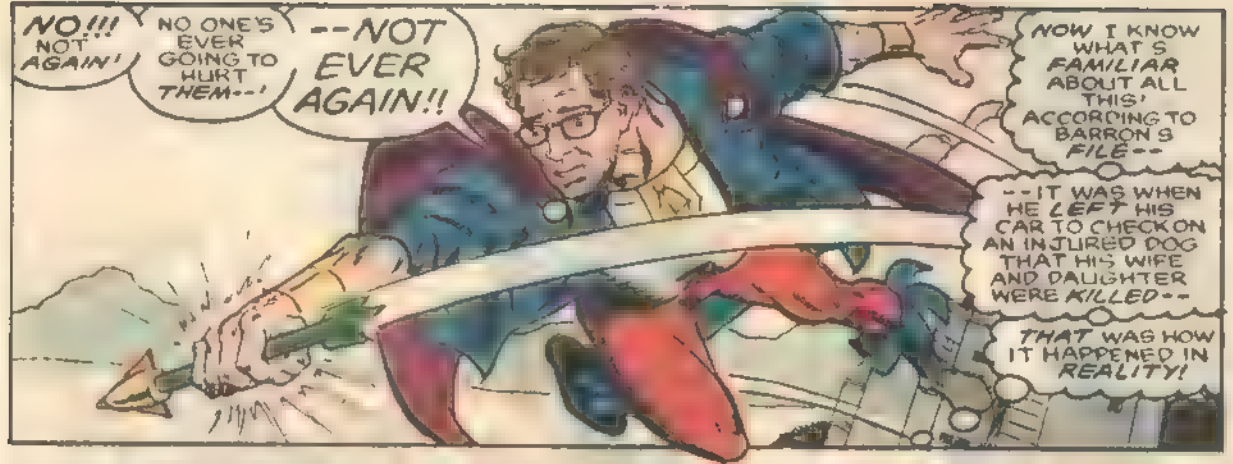
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SAID I NEEDED A REST-- NEEDED TO GET AWAY FROM HERE.













?? SHOULD HAVE KNOWN--

UH OH HEADS UP--

HERE COMES TUCKER FRY OF ALL OF THESE SCOUNDRELS



-- HE'S THE ONE WHO HATES ME THE MOST!

AT THE MOMENT-- I'M NOT TOO CRAZY ABOUT HIM EITHER!



PETER THANK HEAVEN!

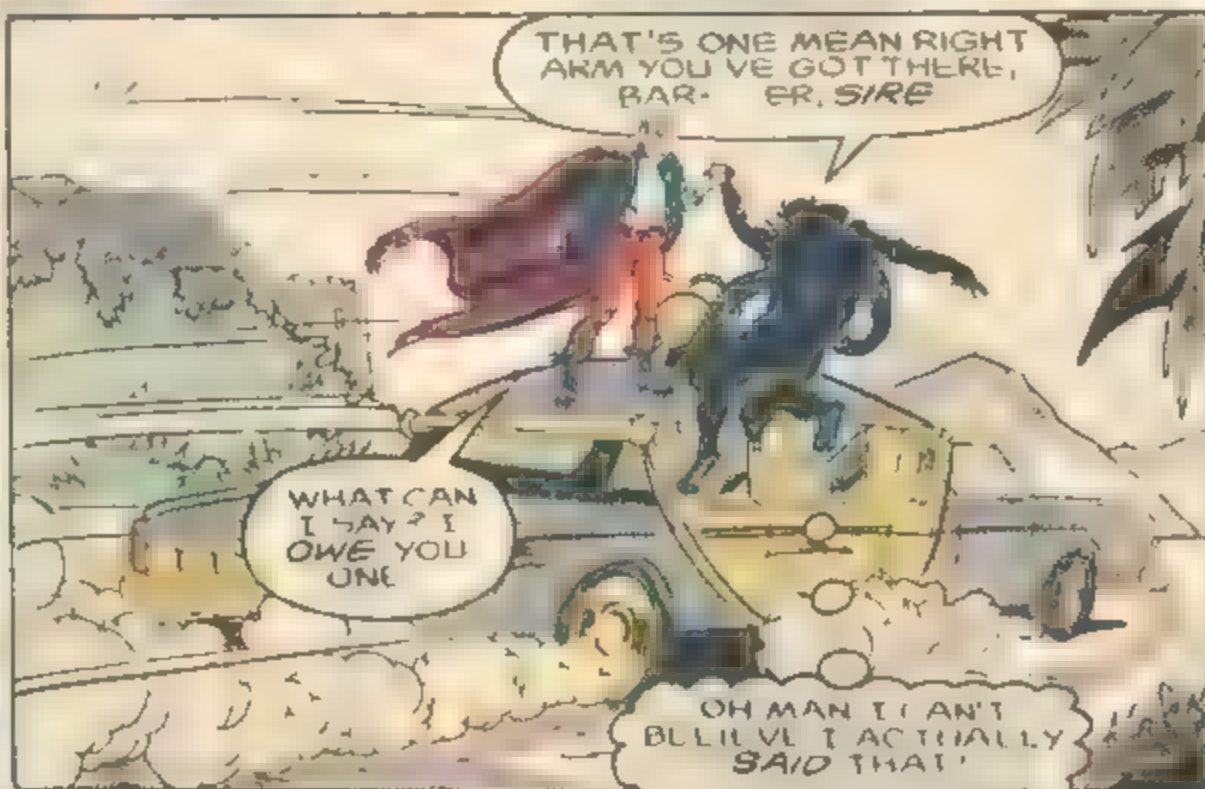
HIT IT SEDGE! FULL SPEED AHEAD!

WHOA!

LOSING MY GRIP--



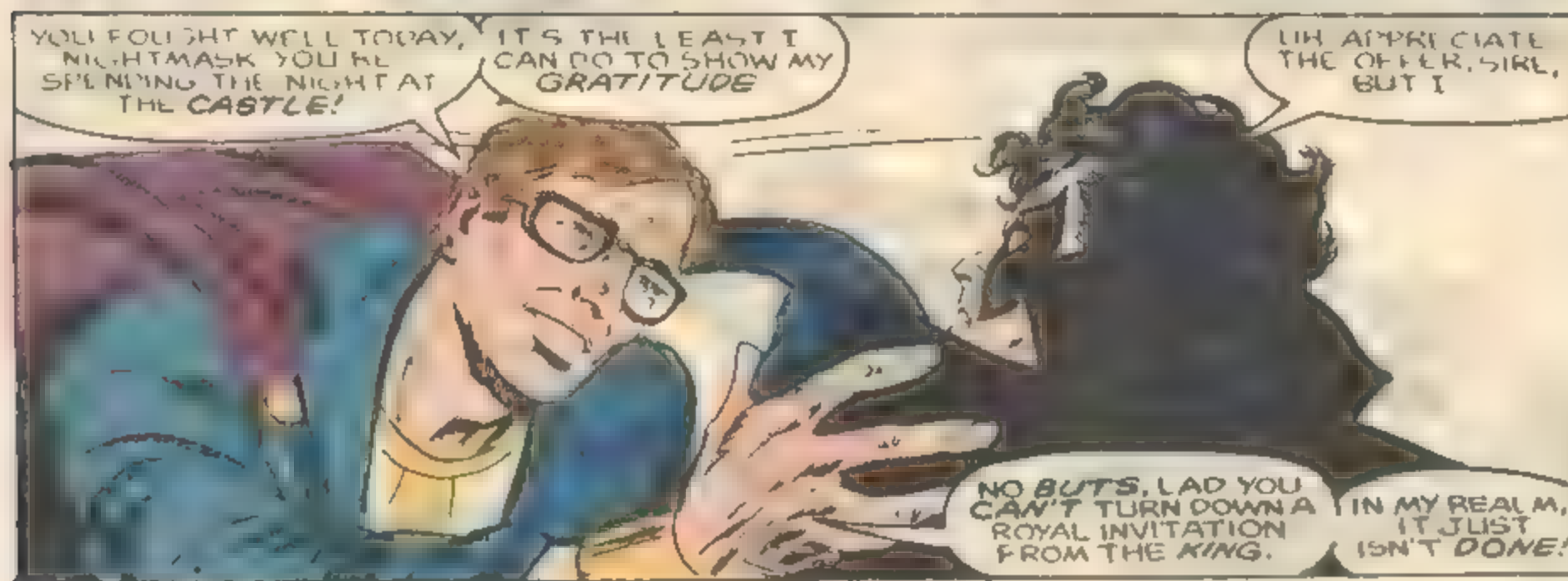
BUT I HAVEN'T!



THAT'S ONE MEAN RIGHT ARM YOU'VE GOT THERE, BAR- ER, SIRE

WHAT CAN I SAY? I OWE YOU ONE

OH MAN I CAN'T BELIEVE I ACTUALLY SAID THAT!



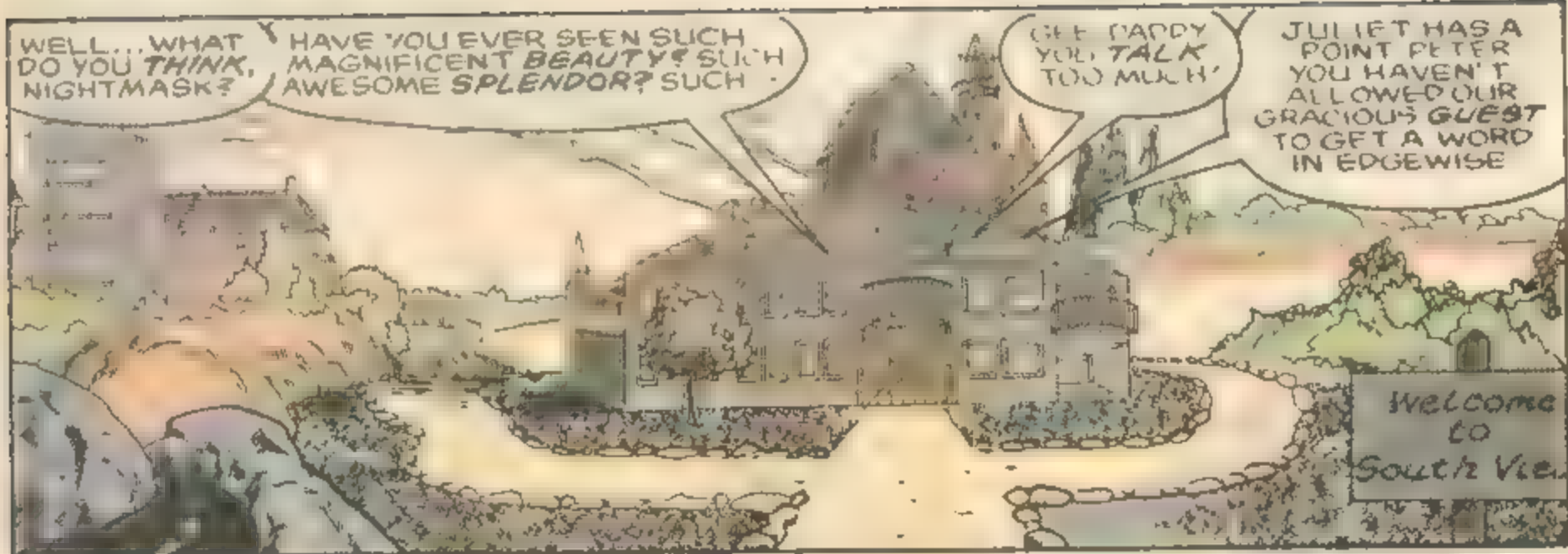
YOU FOUGHT WELL TODAY, NIGHTMASK YOU'RE SPENDING THE NIGHT AT THE CASTLE!

IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO TO SHOW MY GRATITUDE

UH APPRECIATE THE OFFER, SIRE, BUT I

NO BUTS, LAD YOU CAN'T TURN DOWN A ROYAL INVITATION FROM THE KING.

IN MY REALM, IT JUST ISN'T DONE!



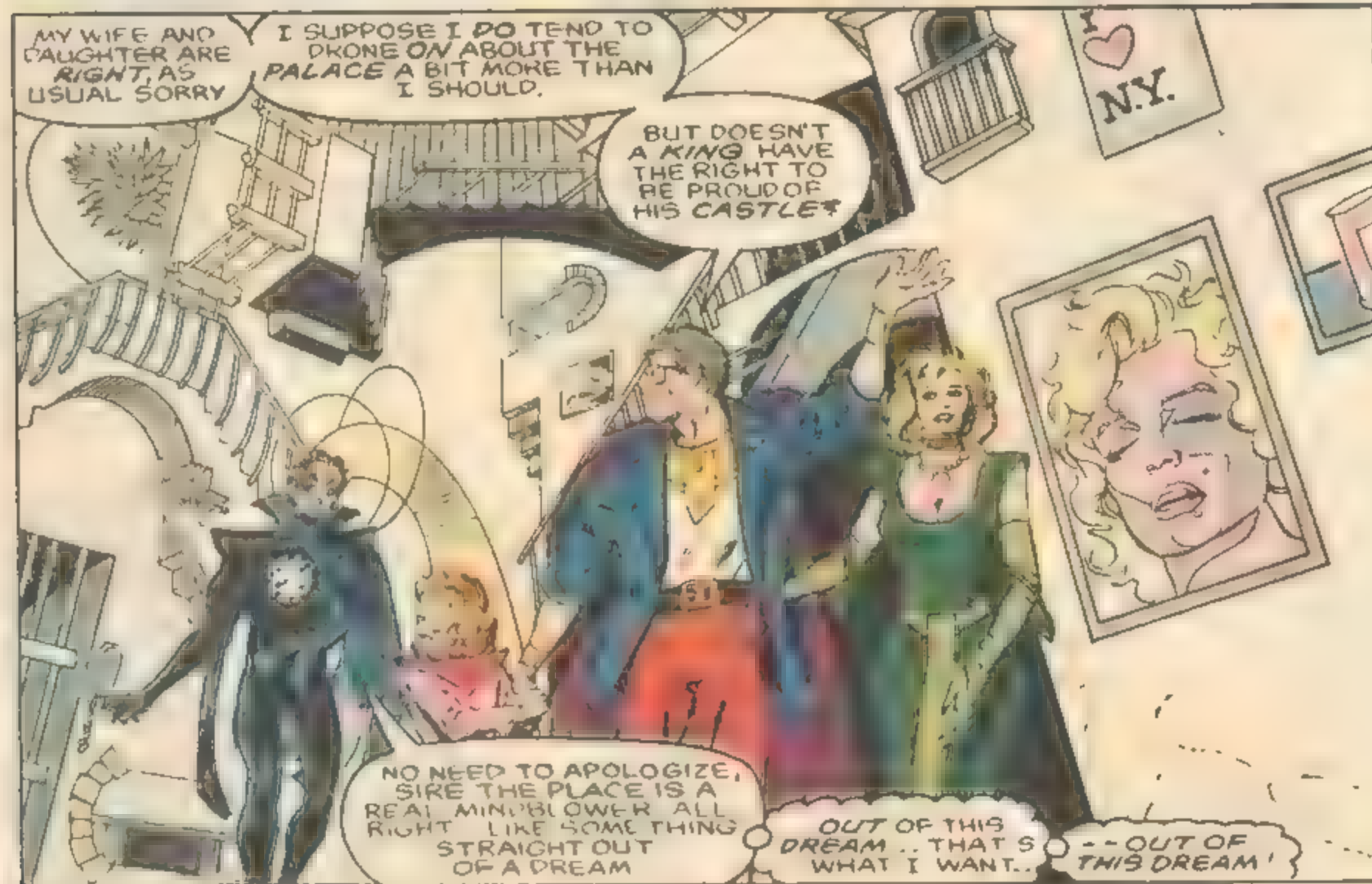
WELL... WHAT DO YOU *THINK*, NIGHTMASK?

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SUCH MAGNIFICENT *BEAUTY*? SUCH AWESOME *SPLendor*? SUCH

GET DADDY YOU TALK TOO MUCH!

JULIET HAS A POINT PETER YOU HAVEN'T ALLOWED OUR GRACIOUS GUEST TO GET A WORD IN EDGEWISE

Welcome to South View



MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER ARE RIGHT, AS USUAL SORRY

I SUPPOSE I DO TEND TO DRONE ON ABOUT THE PALACE A BIT MORE THAN I SHOULD.

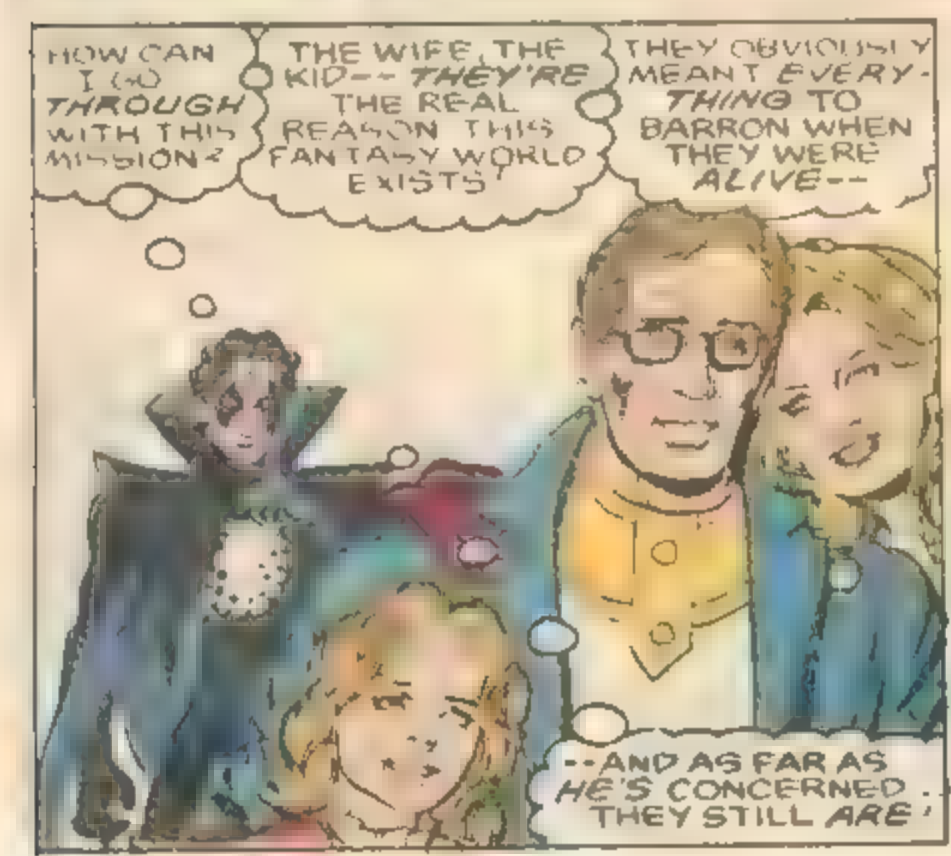
BUT DOESN'T A KING HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE PROUD OF HIS CASTLE?

I ♥ N.Y.

NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE, SIRE THE PLACE IS A REAL MINDBLOWER ALL RIGHT - LIKE SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF A DREAM

OUT OF THIS DREAM... THAT'S WHAT I WANT...

-- OUT OF THIS DREAM!



HOW CAN I GO THROUGH WITH THIS MISSION?

THE WIFE, THE KID-- *THEY'RE* THE REAL REASON THIS FANTASY WORLD EXISTS!

THEY OBVIOUSLY MEANT EVERYTHING TO BARRON WHEN THEY WERE ALIVE--

--AND AS FAR AS HE'S CONCERNED, THEY STILL ARE!

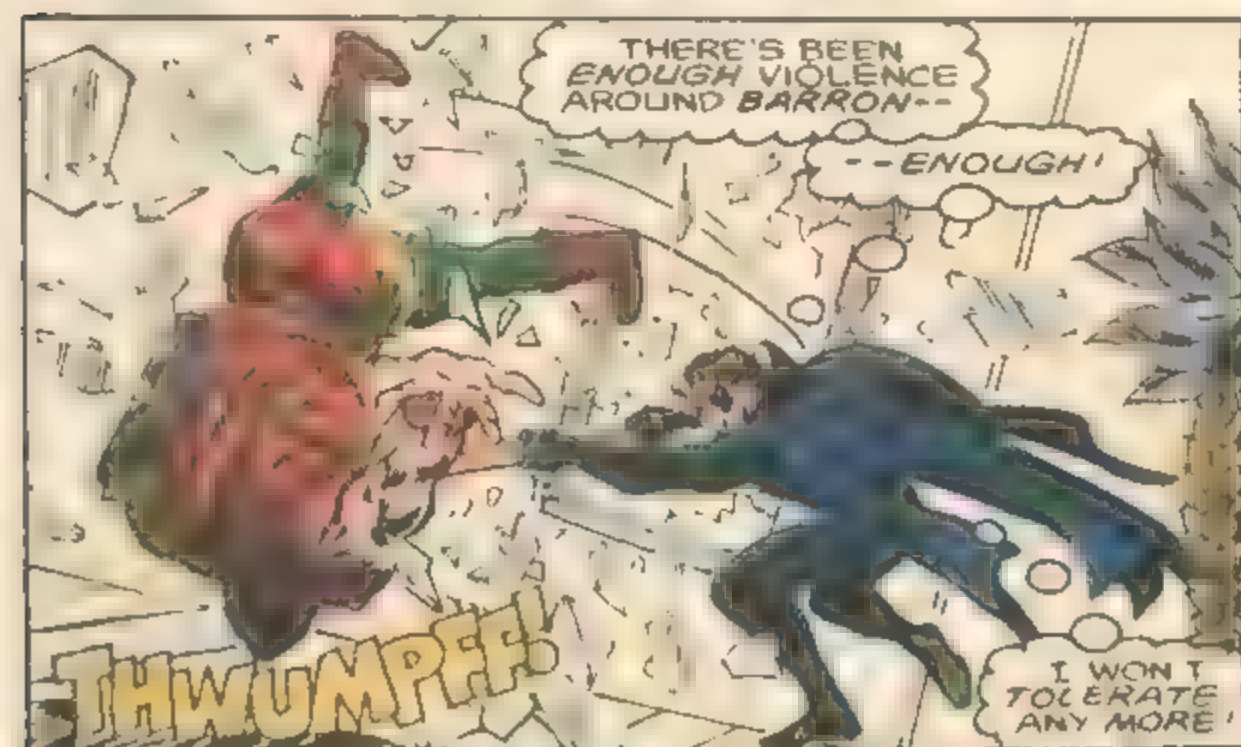


THE GUEST CHAMBER, MY FRIEND YOU CAN RETIRE FOR AN HOUR OR SO BEFORE THE EVENING MEAL

BUT BE FOREWARNED-- PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A FEAST!

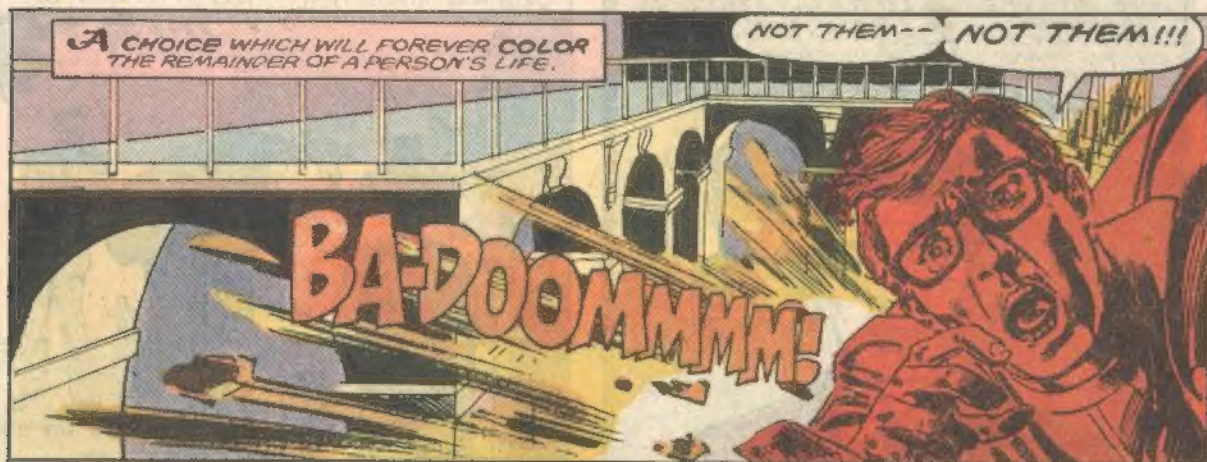
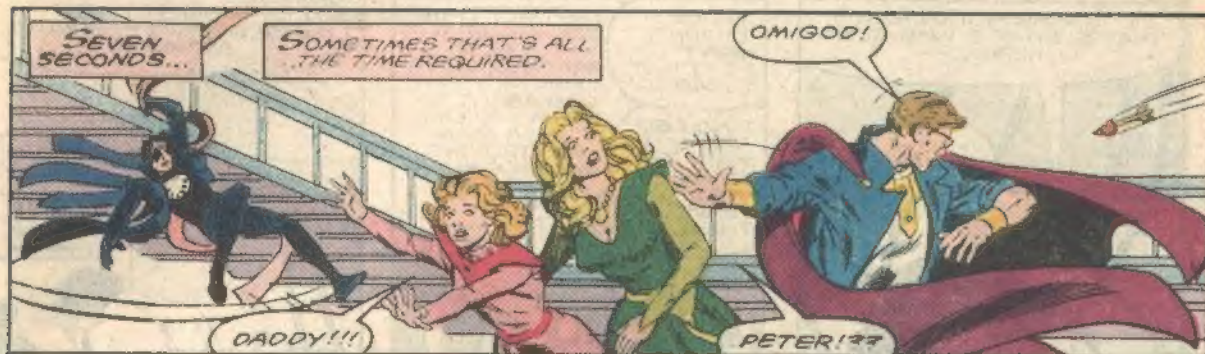
YOU'RE TOO KIND, SIRE

WAY, WAY TOO KIND.











... I TRASHED YOUR DREAM...
THAT'S WHAT I WAS SENT
HERE TO--

KEITH...
KEITH!

YOU'RE OUT.
IT'S ALL
RIGHT NOW--

YOU'RE BACK
WITH LUCIAN
AND ME.



TEDDY...
I DIDN'T
WANT TO
DO IT BUT
I HAD TO!

I KILLED
THEM--I
MADE THE
CHOICE
NOT TO
SAVE
THEM...

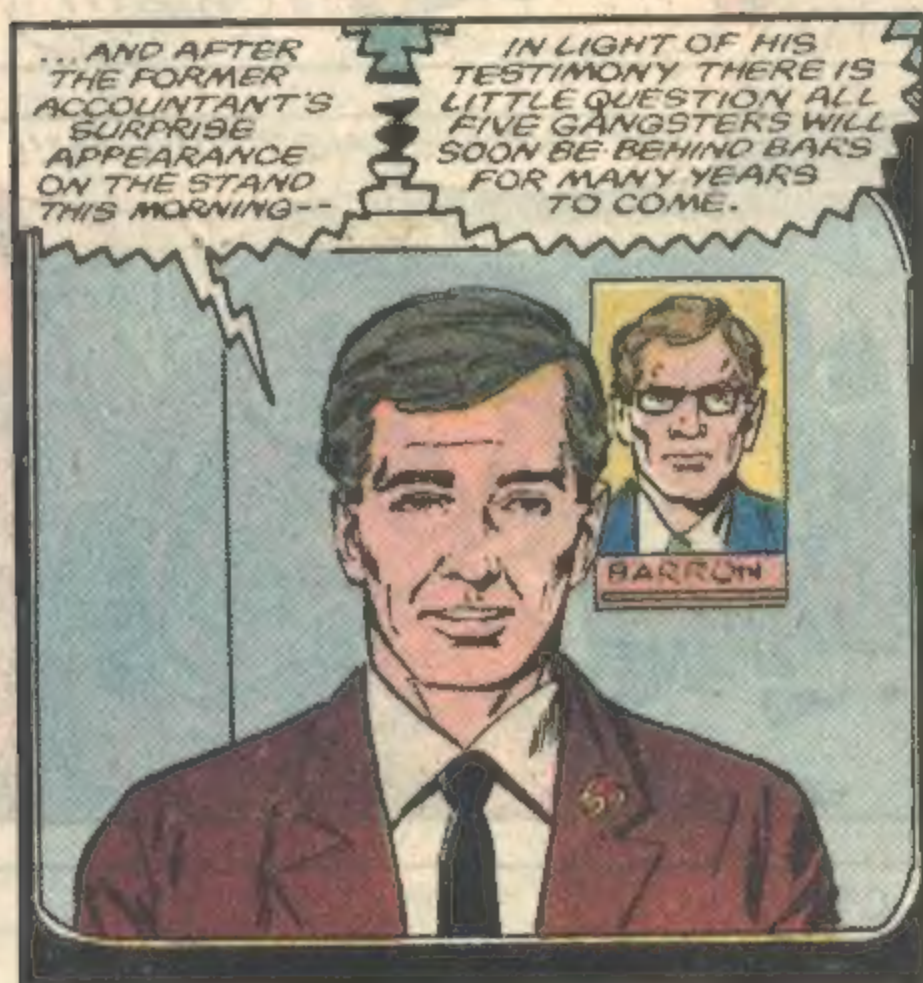
THE ONLY THING
YOU KILLED WAS
A SICK
FANTASY, KEITH.
A FANTASY THAT
WAS ABOUT TO
CLAIM THE LIFE
OF A MAN
DESTROYING
HIMSELF WITH
GRIEF AND
GUILT!



THANKS TO YOU,
PETER BARRON IS AWAKE...
AND ALIVE!

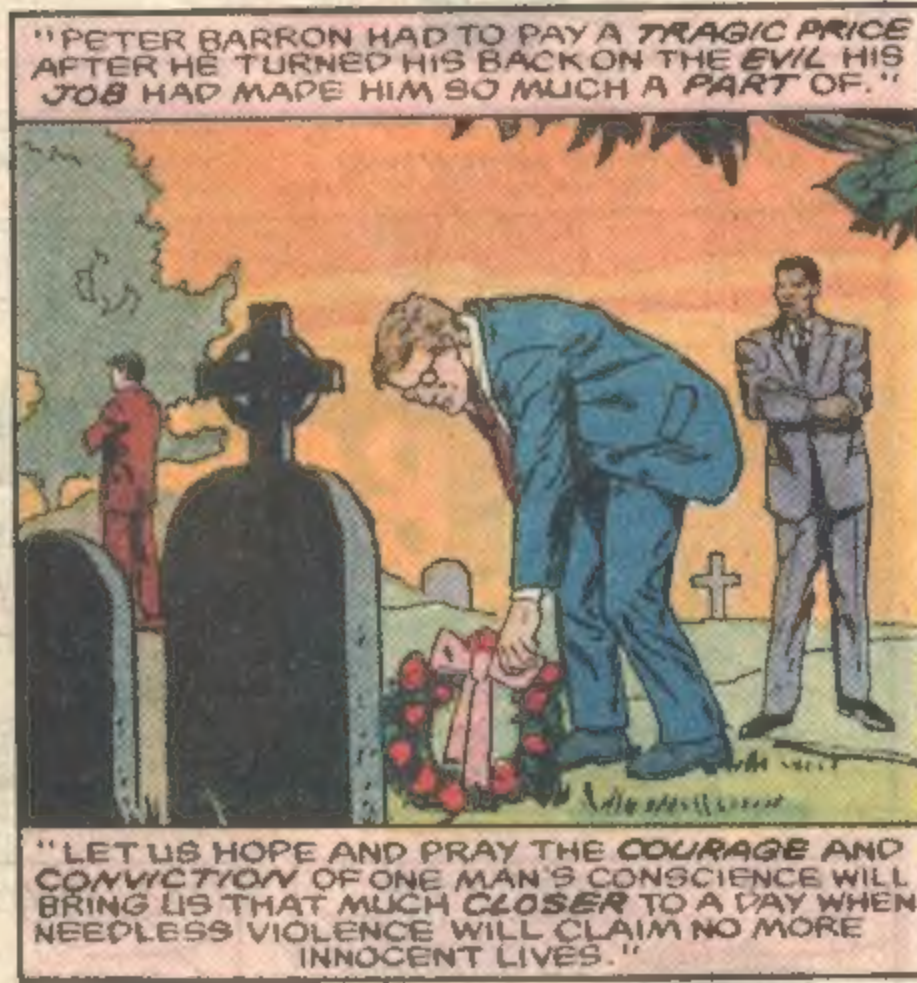
YOUR
WORDS, LUCIAN...
NOT HIS.

I VERY MUCH
DOUBT HE WOULD
THANK ME.



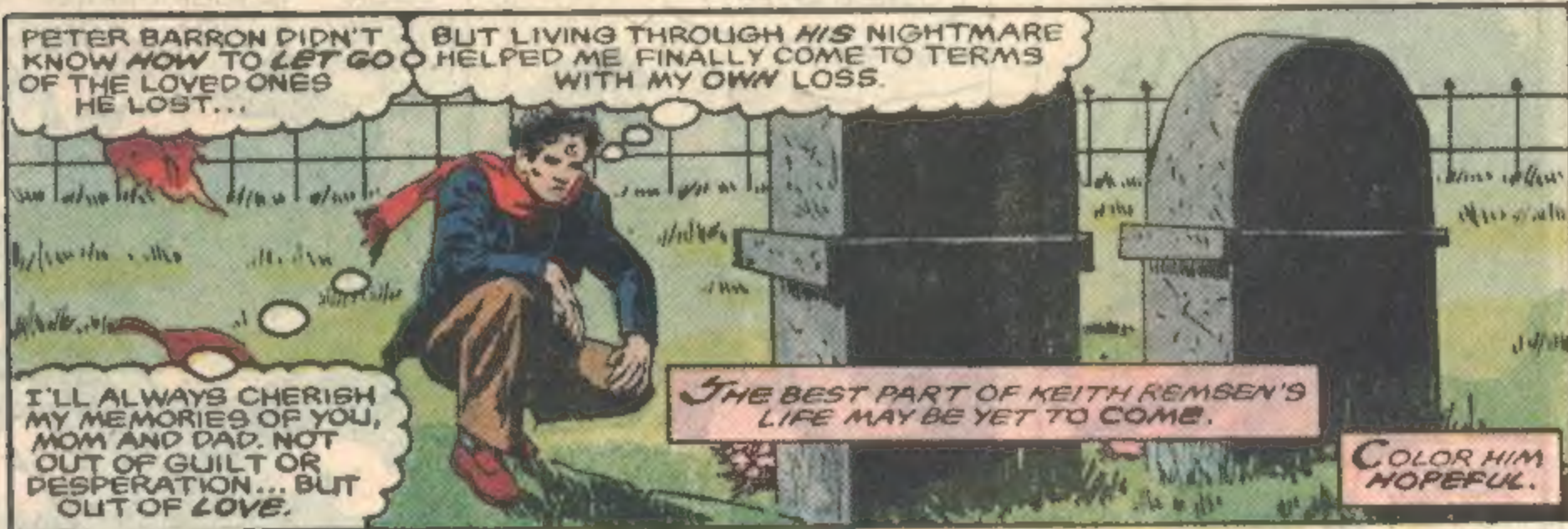
... AND AFTER
THE FORMER
ACCOUNTANT'S
SURPRISE
APPEARANCE
ON THE STAND
THIS MORNING--

IN LIGHT OF HIS
TESTIMONY THERE IS
LITTLE QUESTION ALL
FIVE GANGSTERS WILL
SOON BE BEHIND BARS
FOR MANY YEARS
TO COME.



"PETER BARRON HAD TO PAY A TRAGIC PRICE
AFTER HE TURNED HIS BACK ON THE EVIL HIS
JOB HAD MADE HIM SO MUCH A PART OF."

"LET US HOPE AND PRAY THE COURAGE AND
CONVICTION OF ONE MAN'S CONSCIENCE WILL
BRING US THAT MUCH CLOSER TO A DAY WHEN
NEEDLESS VIOLENCE WILL CLAIM NO MORE
INNOCENT LIVES."



PETER BARRON DIDN'T
KNOW HOW TO LET GO
OF THE LOVED ONES
HE LOST...

BUT LIVING THROUGH HIS NIGHTMARE
HELPED ME FINALLY COME TO TERMS
WITH MY OWN LOSS.

I'LL ALWAYS CHERISH
MY MEMORIES OF YOU,
MOM AND DAD. NOT
OUT OF GUILT OR
DESPERATION... BUT
OUT OF LOVE.

THE BEST PART OF KEITH REMSEN'S
LIFE MAY BE YET TO COME.

COLOR HIM
HOPEFUL.